

Remember the Lessons of Tiananmen Square

Thirty-five years ago, on the night of June 3, 1989, the Chinese Communist Party murdered thousands of democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. This event resonates even today and needs to be remembered.

Compared to the 35 million deliberately starved to death in the '50s and the millions killed in the Cultural Revolution of the '70s, the smaller number of victims of the Tiananmen Square massacre hardly registers. Yet by 1989 the Chinese Communist Party had put on a kinder, gentler face, and many expected it to move toward democratic rule.

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But we were wrong. Instead, the winds of freedom blowing through the Soviet Empire terrified the rulers in Beijing. The Red Army crushed the democratic demonstrators in one bloody night.

The communists had survived 1989, but another terror gripped them in 1991 when the American Army effortlessly destroyed the best military technology in the Communist Block during the First Gulf War. The Red Army was no match for the Americans because, like the Russians and Iraqis, China could not match American funding for defense and technology. To compete, China had to become richer, but its communist/socialist economic system produced only poverty. The solution came from statesman Deng Xiaoping, who put China on a path toward a modified version of the capitalist system.

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Deng went first to the Red Army and got its leaders to agree to capitalist reforms if they received more funding. Then he went to the coastal city governors and got them to agree to finance the Red Army in exchange for supporting capitalism. Finally, Deng won support of the Communist Party by promising to keep it in power with the Red Army and the increased capitalist wealth. Deng redefined socialism as any economic system that worked—that is, capitalism—and popularized the saying “To be rich is glorious.”

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